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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ABUJA 001593

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STATE FOR AF/W, AF/RSA, PM
OSD FOR NELSON
LAGOS FOR HINSON-JONES, GREANEY, CASS

E.O. 12958: 5/8/12
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SUBJECT: NIGERIA: ARMY MINISTER ON RONCO, BENUE,
TRAVEL TO WASHINGTON

REF: A.) STATE 79557, B.) LAGOS 927, C.) ABUJA 1193

CLASSIFIED BY AMBASSADOR HOWARD F. JETER; REASONS 1.5
(D).

1. (C) SUMMARY: During a May 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Minister of State for Defense (Army) Lawal Batagarawa said he planned to visit Washington on May 24 to meet with human rights NGOs, USG officials and the Hill. Impressed by the accomplishments of Operation Avid Recovery, he agreed help identify two people as points of contact for RONCO in Abuja and Lagos. Batagarawa added that he would try to help RONCO as much as possible. Ambassador Jeter was accompanied by PolMilOff, and Batagarawa by his Special Assistant, Balarabe Lawal. END SUMMARY

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BENUE UPDATE
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2. (C) Unable to travel to Washington in late April as initially planned, Batagarawa now hoped to leave Abuja May 24 for the U.S. (this has now been shifted to May 26). The main purpose of the trip would be to give an update on the GON investigation into the communal violence in the Middle Belt, especially the violence in Benue last October when soldiers killed scores of civilians in reprisal for the execution of 19 soldiers. While in Washington, Batagarawa wants to meet with human rights NGOs, particularly Human Rights Watch, and hopes to make calls at State, DOD and on the Hill. He might be joined by Dr. Sani Sufi, the Secretary of the Judicial Inquiry on Conflict in

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Benue, Plateau, Nassarawa and Taraba States, to help brief people on the latest in the investigations. Batagarawa added that he hoped to resolve the issue of funding for the Commission before his departure for Washington. Ambassador Jeter commended his plan to call on human rights NGOs as well as keeping in touch with the Hill.

3. (C) Focusing on Benue, the Ambassador noted that he had spoken to former Chief of Army Staff Malu recently, who was going to make a submission to the Commission. Malu was still upset that the President had not apologized for the events of last October or offered condolences to the families. Batagarawa argued that an apology could impugn guilt, an inappropriate step before the Commission completed its investigations. The Commission had to be allowed to function without influence or complications created by public statements from the government; the institutionalization of rule of law being the ultimate goal. Becoming animated, and showing disdain for Tiv claims of being the sole victims, the Army Minister added that Tiv were killing Fulani, "on a daily basis-even today, as we sit here."

4. (C) COMMENT: Conflict between Fulani, Tiv and Jukun is still an unfortunate common occurrence in the troubled eastern Middle Belt, despite the efforts of federal security services and some state governments. Fulani nomadic herders are often targets of Tiv farmers who perceive the Fulanis' grazing cattle as a threat to their crops. The causes of clashes between Tiv and Jukun are more complicated; involving access to resources through control of local governments and historical distrust over past grievances. The

Commission, in addition to investigating unlawful acts, is supposed to reveal the causes of these conflicts, and to offer solutions (Ref C). END COMMENT.

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RONCO
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15. (C) Shifting the conversation to Operation Avid Recovery (OAR) and the RONCO follow-on effort, Ambassador Jeter updated the Minister on the successes of the OAR team, in terms of ordnance and civil affairs work. As RONCO would soon begin operations, the contractor would likely need points-of-contact in Abuja and Lagos to address operational and other issues. Ideally, one POC should be civilian, the other military. For example, RONCO needed C-4 or an equivalent to destroy unexploded ordnance, but was unsure to whom to turn for its supply or if C-4 were even available in Nigeria. Moreover, RONCO would need assistance for duty-free customs clearance for its equipment, as delays would seriously impede its work.

16. (C) Batagarawa agreed, and said his Special Assistant, Balarabe Lawal would be the Abuja-GON POC for the contractor. Lawal would help resolve issues and would keep Batagarawa in the loop. The Minister said he would check on the C-4 question himself. Meanwhile, he would identify a POC from the military in Lagos that he could trust to assist RONCO there. Batagarawa was tempted to call the Customs Chief himself to facilitate the RONCO shipments. Thinking better of it, he reasoned that the Ministry and Services have people in Lagos who work with Customs there. In the long run, utilizing the people in Lagos would be more reliable. In any case, RONCO would have the support it needed to get the job done, Batagarawa promised.

17. (C) COMMENT: We have plans for the RONCO team leader to come to Abuja meetings the week of May 20. This will ensure a smooth operation on this end, and facilitate Lawal's assistance to the contractor.

18. (C) Batagarawa has not been able to provide an answer on C-4 equivalent, though we have been in daily contact with his office on the subject. It may not be available in Nigeria. He planned to name BG Emden, Commandant at Ikeja, as the Lagos POC, but PolMilOff suggested otherwise due to problems with Emden. Batagarawa readily agreed to find someone else, and has been discussing "the right person" with MG Abdu, GOC of 1 Division. In any case, with his assurances we are mildly confident that we can move the RONCO mission forward. END COMMENT.

JETER